

**Sermon preached by Mr. Michael Bittenbender
at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, December 31, 2017**

AMBASSADORS OF GOD

2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2

Good morning,

I think it is safe to say winter is here. I am glad each of you braved the cold temperatures. This morning I invite you to turn with me to the second book of Corinthians chapter 5, starting at verse number 16.

“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For He says. ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”

It seemed a little daunting, being asked to preach December 31st; almost entirely meaning I will have to preach something about the new year beginning. I started thinking about New Year’s resolution and told myself, new year new me. I’m going to write the best sermons anyone has ever heard. Lucky for me that doesn’t start till tomorrow.

Here is a “New Year’s resolution,” or a challenge for us to do better. Now to say “do better” doesn’t mean that some of you, because I will admit to being one of those that doesn’t do this enough, but some of you I know do a great job at this. Let’s make a New Year’s resolution to become better ambassadors for God.

I felt led to talk about this passage in light of some of the vision team’s work, what God’s will is in the life of every Christian, and a good reminder for us all.

This passage in 2 Corinthians sheds some light and guides us as to what this means, to be an ambassador for God and how to accomplish this.

WHAT IS AN AMBASSADOR?

First, let me define ambassador according to Webster’s dictionary.
An ambassador, according to Webster’s dictionary, is:

“An official envoy; *especially* : a diplomatic agent of the highest rank accredited to a foreign government or sovereign as the resident representative of his or her own government or sovereign or appointed for a special and often temporary diplomatic assignment. Also, an authorized representative or messenger”

The Greek word for ambassador is *presbuo*. This word is used only one other time in the New Testament and that is in Ephesians 6:20 when Paul is asking for prayers while he is chained up in a prison to be an ambassador for Christ. Paul takes the idea of an ambassador very seriously and has it in his heart to always be preaching the message God has given to him. When discussing evangelism, Paul uses this term, this official role that we have to represent God here on earth.

Every single one of those who are in Christ have this role of being God’s official envoy, His authorized messenger. We, as ambassadors, embark on the job at hand, the ministry of reconciliation as it says in verse 18.

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE?

One then asks, “What is the message?” The message, as stated here in this passage, is that God is reconciling us to Himself by not counting our sins against us, and making Him who had no sin to be sin for us, that we may be the righteousness of God.

Let’s define another word to help clear this up a bit. Reconciliation. The Greek word here is *katallagē*. This has the meaning of an exchange taking place. Money changers, when reconciling with someone, would exchange items of equivalent values. The exchange that takes place with God is our sin for His righteousness. Our sin was poured into Christ at His crucifixion. His righteousness is poured into us at our conversion. The difference with this exchange and that of the money changers is that God takes something immeasurably valuable and exchanges it for something utterly worthless.

God is reconciling us to himself. He makes this exchange happen. He does this by making Christ to be sin so that when God looks at us, He declares us righteous.

WHO DO WE DELIVER IT TO?

We are then given the ministry of reconciliation. We, as ambassadors, have our message and now we must deliver it. To whom do we deliver it?

Everyone. Our neighbor, our co-worker, our family, strangers we come across. Anyone and everyone who will hear it. The beginning of this passage will help us understand this a little bit. Verse 16 says, “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.”

What does it mean to see someone from a worldly point of view? With selfishness being the natural posture of thinking, it would seem then that regarding someone from a worldly point of view would be to look at each person selfishly. This means that we look at people as to what

can we gain from them. That someone's identity, usefulness, and being is regarded by what we can get out of them. The trouble is how we see Christ in this way. Both people from Jesus' day and people today often see Jesus as a means to gain things. That Christ's usefulness is only so far as what He can do for us. Now the obvious answer is eternal life is what we have to gain. However, I think a lot of time we see Jesus as Santa Claus. He even tells us, "Ask and it will be given to you". People from Jesus' days may have seen him and thought, great, now I will use Jesus to be healed.

That is assuming a little but knowing human nature, I don't believe it is that far from the truth. We also know that those who came into contact with Him were changed in a different way. We must see each person we come across not as what can we gain, but how can we be an ambassador for God, reconciling this person to God. We must look at this person as the next citizen of the Kingdom of God.

So, we are God's ambassadors to the world, reconciling the world to Him, giving the message that God forgives sins and makes us righteous in His eyes to all those who are around us. We view these people not as what we can get from them but with a kingdom perspective.

WHY?

Why is this so important? Because we are God's fellow workers in this and the day of salvation is now. The day of salvation is here for you, and everyone else here on earth. We should not delay in accepting God's gift of salvation and we should not delay spreading the news of salvation to those around us.

HOW?

The question is then asked, "How do we do this?" And I know people start to make excuses such as, "I don't have the gift of evangelism". And I don't believe evangelism is a gift. Evangelism is a command. Christ says go. He doesn't say if you have the gift of evangelism go, but commands all His believers to go and Jesus says if you love Me you will obey My commands. If we love Jesus, we will go and make disciples of all nations.

Here are some keys to consider when doing this:

1. We must know whose ambassador we are, and have an intimate relationship with Him. We must know God, know His voice, know His nature, know His will, know His character. If we do not know God, we cannot be His representative. We can't represent someone we don't know.
2. We must know the message. Jim Byrnes, Former Youth Pastor at Falls Church said this, "You cannot give what you do not have." You can't give the message if you don't even have the message. 1 Peter says we must be ready to give an answer for the hope we have.
3. We must love one another. Chris Moreman, Pastor at Grace Capital City said this: "God's plan A for revealing Himself to the world, is the way in which we love one another. Anyone here love apologetics? All of those arguments for the existence of God, whether it's the ontological, transcendental argument, the existentialism argument all of these wonderful and

beautiful arguments. There is a place for these, but I believe Love is one of the greatest tools and arguments for the existence of God.”

We, who are in Christ are God’s ambassadors co-working in the ministry of reconciliation. We are to look for those future citizens in the kingdom of God, and work, on behalf of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to reconcile them to God.

Let us, you and me, make a new year’s resolution to become better ambassadors for God, spreading the Good News to those around us. Let this church be a church of ambassadors for God to our neighbors here in Kingstowne, the Northern Virginia area, the U. S. and to the ends of the world.

Amen